

[Margurite Rast]

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Folkstuff - Pioneer History

FOLKWAY

Mrs. Edgerton Arnold, P.W.

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1930. PIONEER WOMEN OF TEXAS:

“Of interest to all the people of Waco and McLennan County, is the story of Mrs. Neil McLennan, wife of Neil McLennan, the first pioneer to build a home near Waco. Mrs. McLennan was born in Scotland and came to North Carolina with her parents, where she married Neil McLennan, also of Scotland. In 1820, she and her husband, and three small children, with some relatives and friends, moved to Florida. While it was still under Spanish rule. After fourteen years in Florida, they decided to come to Texas. The men went into the forest, cut down logs, and made a schooner large enough to hold several families.

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"Their's was a thrilling voyage across the Gulf of Mexico. On the way, they were captured by pirates. A storm arose and the McLennan's boat kept knocking against the pirates boat. Fearing their boat would be wrecked, they released the schooner, much to the delight of the McLennan's when the light of day broke over the waters.

"Without further mishap, they landed at the mouth of the Brazos, sold their schooner, came to Fond's creek, near Fort Nashville, near the present town of Camaron, in what is now Fall's county. They found the Indians malicious and murderous.

"Time and time again, Neil McLennan had to throw down the plow and flee with his family to the Fort at Old Nashville, twelve miles distant. Most of the way was marshy and often they had to wade in water knee deep, and be frightened to death for fear the baby would cry and call attention to them.

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"The Indians did not harm any of Neil McLennan's family, but they murdered Mr. McLennan's brother, Laughlin, one day when he was repairing a fence. His wife blew the dinner horn and when he did not come, she went to find him, only to find him killed. They captured her, and her two sons, and baby and burned the house with the old grandmother in it. A few days later, the baby became ill, [and?] they dashed it brains out against a tree. She and one of the boys died, and the other, John, later known as Bosque John, was kept a prisoner for twelve years. The Neil McLennans kept his land and the revenue from it, and when he was released by the Indians, following a council at [Waco?] Springs, they gave him his inheritance.

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"Once, when Neil McLennan was with Major [?] near Waco, he saw the hills around South Bosque. He said they looked just like Scotland, and some day he was going to live there.

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In 1845, their double log cabin was completed on the banks of South Bosque, near a spring.

“In 1932, the Henry Down's Chapter, D.A.R. placed a boulder a few yards from it with a bronze inscription on it, pointing the site out as the first site of the first home in McLennan County.

“The McLennans were very hospitable to new settlers, letting them stay with them until their home was finished, and often giving them chickens, hogs, etc., for a start. On one occasion, the McLennans refused to sell corn to a settler, preferring to keep it to give it to some one who could not buy it.

“They were Scotch Presbyterians and very religious. On Saturday afternoons the cows were milked and turned into the pastures until after the Sabbath. Food was prepared, coffee was ground for Sunday. The larger part of the day was spent in reading the Bible and worshipping God. They never punished the children on Sunday, but they always remembered to give it to them the next day.

“In 1849, the town of Waco was laid off by Waco Spring on the Brazos and a year later, the surrounding county was authorized to be formed into a county. It was called McLennan County for the Neil McLennans, the first settlers. Their son, John McLennan, helped Major Erath survey and lay off Waco, and incidentally, owned the first piano in Waco, brought by ox wagon from Galveston. Their piano is now in the Log House, in Harrington Park, Waco, owned by the Daughters of the Confederacy.

“Mrs. McLennan was a gentle, unassuming woman, spinning and working to make her home in the wilderness a pleasant place in which to live. They had six children and their descendants are among the prominent citizens of McLennan County, and still own a great deal of land, inherited from the first McLennans. They are both buried in the old family burying ground at South Bosque.

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"Another colorful figure [of?] Central Texas and McLennan County was Mrs. Shapley Ross. Se was born in Missouri, September 27, 1817, and at the age of seventeen, married Captain Shapley Ross. They moved to Iowa, and, in 1846, came to the Republic of Texas, settling near Cmeron.

"Here the children had for pets, at one time, two buffalo calves. The girls liked to feed them buckets of milk, and when the feeding was over, they were rewarded for their pains by being knocked down.

"The Indians paid a visit to the Ross home and pointed to everything in the Ross kitchen. Mrs. Ross gladly complied with their wishes, and, to her astonishment, they left, leaving the house and family unharmed.

"Another time, young Sul was out in the woods with his father. Seeing Indians, Mr. Ross picked up the boy, ran with him to the house, 4 cautioning him not to tell his mother that the Indians were near. Mr. Ross that day was wearing a buckskin shirt that was long and belted at the waist. Young Sul in the house kept remarking, "Papa's shirt sure was flapping." These facetious remarks soon disclosed the fact of the Indians.

In 1849, knowing that Waco was to be laid off as a town, the Rosses moved to the Brazos and camped where East Waco now stands. This land of future Waco belonged to Mr. Snyder in Galveston. Major Erath received permission to survey the land and sell it off as lots. On the eventful day, Major Erath began at Waco Spring and laid off Bridge Street. The men were there with axes ready to cut down trees and build houses, as soon as the sale of the lots was over. The lots were auctioned off, and cheap as they were, people thought they were too high.

Mr. Shapley Ross bought the first two lots at five dollars a piece, the being between what is now the Suspension Bridge and the New County Bridge. Here, they built a double log

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cabin. All the cooking was done out of doors, and they carried their water from Waco Spring.

“Later, this house became too small and a two-story log house was built on the land where now stands the Cotton Palace, and at one time, was Twelfth and Ross Streets.

“Two daughters, Mary and Margaret, went to school at Independence, making the trip on horseback. At one time they met the Indians, but when they found that they were the daughters of Shapley Ross, they were released.

“Mr. Ross ran a ferry boat across the Brazos near the Spring for seventeen years. One day, when Margaret was sitting on the porch of the log cabin, she watched the ferry pulling up to the bank. On it stood a handsome young man. He was George Barnard, who ran a trading post on the Tehuacana Creek. He was the first man in McLennan County, and at his colorful post from 1844, many Indians had come to trade deer, bear and buffalo skins. Seeing him, Mary facetiously remarked he was going to be her future husband.

“So it turned out. Her sister Margaret at the same time became engaged to Frank Harris. The girls decided upon a double wedding and sent a negro to Houston for supplies for the wedding. He returned two months after the wedding was over. Captain Ross gave each of them ten acres of land around where the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Rail Road station now stands. Mary Street was named for Mary Ross, and Barnard Street for George Barnard.

“Sul Ross, later, became a celebrated Indian fighter and governor of Texas.

“Mrs. Ross was a gentle, true pioneer woman, enjoying the early growth of Waco and her descendants are among the most prominent citizens of Texas.”